Corps and Border Patrol go green with new station

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Border Patrol celebrated the completion of a new environmentally conscious station in El Paso, Texas, August 16.

Tremendous growth in staffing and enforcement-related assets as well as the normal aging of infrastructure has presented many challenges for the Border Patrol including deficiencies in parking space, storage locations, computer equipment, and a lack of training space.

This has led to a sector wide need for infrastructure upgrades and improvements.

On hand to recognize the event were U.S. Congressman Silvestre Reyes, Chief Patrol Agent El Paso Sector, Victor M. Manjarrez, Jr., Army Corps of Engineers Southwest Division, Brig. Gen. Kendall P. Cox, and Corps of Engineers Albuquerque District, Lt. Col. Kimberly M. Colloton.

The El Paso sector of the Border Patrol collaborated with the Corps to lead in initiating and implementing new ways to improve their primary mission, which according to Patrick Berry, a supervisory agent with the Border Patrol, is "…to defend our nation against terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering into the United States, while improving the quality of life in the community that we serve by reducing crime."

Successes in El Paso have prompted similar programs and initiatives in other parts of the nation.

Berry says that El Paso has taken the lead in being aware of their environmental impact and seeking ways to minimize it. This station is the first of three phases to eventually include a vehicle maintenance shop and the Sector's headquarters.

This is the first Border Patrol station in the nation to incorporate environmentally conscious elements into its design. The Border Patrol and the Corps are expecting it to receive Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification, which is an internationally recognized third-party verification system that defines and measures how "green" a building is.

The LEED rating system has several environmental categories with points awarded for satisfying performance criteria in each. A building must have at least 26 points to be certified.

Ways the station meets performance criteria include low amounts of Volatile Organic Compounds in sealants, paints, carpets, and office furniture; using recycled materials in 80 percent of all construction materials; a 35 kilowatt Photovoltaic System, or solar array, which will provide a portion of the building's energy needs; occupancy sensors which turn off lights when no one is present; the usage of 100 percent recycled water in the vehicle wash bay system; and the use of Light Emitting Diode, LED, lights in the vehicle Sally Port. LED lights use approximately 56 percent less energy than conventional Metal Halide lights. Additionally, to minimize the amount of waste generated during construction, the contractor, Banes Construction, used specialized dumpsters to facilitate the recycling of leftover construction materials.

The 49,118 square foot facility has already garnered praise from the agents who use it. In Berry's words, "As an agent, I view this new facility as one more way that our nation is supporting the job we are doing on the border, and I am anticipating the move to our new station with enthusiasm."

Chief Patrol Agent El Paso Sector, Victor M. Manjarrez, Jr., said that a person "can always tell an El Paso station agent because they're the ones with the big smiles." He added that the new building will result in an improvement in morale which improves the person, leading to improved leadership and efficiency. Manjarrez also said that it's nice to have some room to "extend elbows." The old station was only 13,000 square feet with 350 agents working out of it.

It's not just the agents working out of the station who notice the many new features either. The station has garnered attention from top officials including Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano. She noted in a June 26, 2009, Efficiency Review Update the 25 percent reduction in energy costs the station would have. This translates into a projected $16,000 or more a year savings in energy costs.

The station was built on the southwest corner of the Castner Range, a former military firing range located near Fort Bliss, Texas. This brought some unique obstacles to the design and construction process. Because it is a large, undeveloped stretch of land within a rapidly developing part of El Paso, there is concern by local residents over how it should (and should not) be developed. Part of the issue involved safety - since it was a former firing range there was unexploded ordnance, or UXO, that had to be cleaned up before the land could be developed.

The Corps of Engineers was involved in the clean up process to ensure the safety of those working on the former range. When that was completed, the agencies involved worked hard, as U. S. Army Chief of Engineers and Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, General Van Antwerp, is known to say "…to get her done."

Jeff Firebaugh, project manager with the Corps of Engineers, said that the cooperation by everyone involved "shows a good relationship between the Corps and the CBP [Customs and Border Patrol]." With the increased federal focus on border security, the working relationship between the two will continue to exist well into the future.

Drawing from historical trends, El Paso's successful partnering with the Corps could prompt similar stations across the nation.